

History and histories: Fanon and Glissant on Breaking with the Colonial Past

David Ventura

ABSTRACT: In the conclusion to *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon seemingly rejects the role that the past can play in the creation of decolonized futurities, famously writing: “I am not a prisoner of History (*l'Histoire*). I must not look for the meaning of my destiny in that direction.” On this basis, Fanon’s thought has often been read as *opposed* to the more prophetic vision of the past offered by Édouard Glissant, which emphasizes the contrapuntal potentialities that inhere in Black vernacular cultures and histories. In contrast to such readings, this paper contends that Fanon and Glissant similarly uphold a *dual* conception of the past as encompassing both *History* (*l'Histoire*), or the racialized fantasy of chronological linearity that was invented by Western modernity, and *histories*, a subterranean and mobile network of memories that always remains fugitive to the colonial machinations of History. Tracing this more ambivalent conception of the past through *Black Skin, White Masks*, *Wretched of the Earth*, and the writings that Fanon penned during his time as a psychiatrist in Algeria, I argue that Fanon’s thought on the past, far from being opposed to Glissant’s, in fact similarly upholds the prophetic value that the past *qua* histories can play in unleashing decolonized futurities.

KEYWORDS: History; histories; poethics; decolonial futurity; vernacular cultures; *contretemps*

DESPITE SHARING A critical distance to the Négritude movement, Frantz Fanon and Édouard Glissant’s thought on the future has often been contrasted. Undoubtedly, recent scholarship on Fanon and Glissant has deemed them comparably focused on providing an historically engaged account of the existential deviations that Western colonization has imposed on the lived experiences of racialized and colonized peoples in the



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